

# NUTRITION

## Constipation: A Healthy Diet Can Help

Constipation is when you have trouble having bowel movements. Your stools may be very hard, making them so difficult to pass that you have to strain. Or you may feel like you still need to have a bowel movement even after you've had one. Not everyone has bowel movements once a day. Don't believe ads that say you must have a daily bowel movement to be "regular." A normal range is generally 3 times a day to 3 times a week. You may be getting constipated if you begin to have bowel movements much less often than you usually do.

### **What causes constipation?**

As the food you eat passes through your digestive tract, your body takes nutrients and water from the food. This process creates a stool, which is moved through your intestines with muscle contractions (squeezing motions). A number of things can affect this process. These include not drinking enough fluids, not being active enough, not eating enough fiber, taking certain drugs, not going to the bathroom when you have the urge to have a bowel movement and regularly using laxatives. Any of these things can cause the stools to move more slowly through your intestines, leading to constipation.

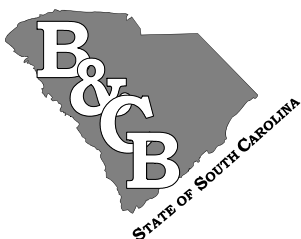
### **What should I eat?**

Eat plenty of fiber. Two to 4 servings of fruits and 3 to 5 servings of vegetables a day is ideal. Add extra fiber to your diet by eating cereals that contain bran or by adding bran as a topping on your fruit or cereal. If you are adding fiber to your diet, start slowly and gradually increase the amount. This will help reduce gas and bloating. Make sure to drink plenty of water too.

### **Tips on preventing constipation**

- Don't resist the urge to have a bowel movement.
- Set aside time to have a bowel movement. A good time may be after breakfast or any other meal.
- Eat more fiber.
- Drink plenty of fluids--at least 8 glasses a day. Fluids can include water, juices, soup, tea and other drinks.
- Don't take laxatives too often.
- Exercise or move around more.

Visit our website health calculators to find out how many grams of fiber you should eat each day. Visit our website at [www.eip.state.sc.us](http://www.eip.state.sc.us) and click on the Prevention Partners logo. Our home page contains health calculators at the bottom of the page. Click on the calculator icon and click on the calculator for fiber listed under the nutrition heading.



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**Employee Insurance Program**  
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